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United States Senate
Office of the Democratic Leader
Washington, D.C. 20510

April 9, 1981

The Honorable Alexander M. Haig, Jr.
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Welcome back from your trip to the Middle East, Madrid, and London. I hope you found your discussions most fruitful.

The purpose of this letter is to raise a number of concerns associated with the announcement that four AWACS will be sold to Saudi Arabia as part of an overall package which includes enhancement of the F-15's previously sold to that country and the proposed sale of KC-135 tankers. In raising these concerns, I want to assure you I have a particular appreciation for the legitimate security needs of a country of such critical importance to the United States as Saudi Arabia. However, I raised the same concerns when President Carter proposed the sale of seven AWACS to Iran in 1977, and I feel these are equally applicable in connection with the proposed sale to the Saudis.

As was brought out in the 1977 hearings, the Air Force maintains that "the E-3A is the most revolutionary development in airpower since the invention of radar." Four years later, AWACS remains a highly sophisticated technology which is critical to our own national defense. Since this would be the first potential delivery of AWACS to a non-NATO country, I am most concerned over potential security risks which could compromise a technology the Soviets are years away from perfecting.

In 1977, the Congress finally agreed to the sale of AWACS to Iran, only after a set of assurances were provided by the President. Because the first AWACS were not scheduled to be delivered to Iran until early 1981, the sale was cancelled after the Shah was deposed.

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I would be most appreciative if you could provide answers the following questions regarding the proposed sale to Saudi Arabia.

First, will the following equipment from U.S. AWACS be installed on the Saudi version: U.S. Government encipherment gear (such as the KG-40); joint tactical information and distribution system (JTIDS); expanded command, control and communications; signal intelligence (SIGINT); additional electronic counter-counter measures (ECCM); and secure mode of identification of friend and foe (IFF)?

It is my understanding that the absence of the above listed equipment in the Saudi AWACS would significantly minimize the risk of U.S. Air Force AWACS performance degradation that could result from any security compromise.

Second, has the U.S., in cooperation with Saudi Arabia, developed special security arrangements that insure adequate protection of the AWACS aircraft? In the case of Iran, the framework for all security measures -- both special and normal -- was the U.S.-Iranian Agreement of June 6, 1974, which provided for the safeguarding of classified information. In addition, it provided that stringent security precautions were to be observed by Iran with respect to classified information received from the United States. Such information was specifically defined in its broadest sense to encompass classified equipment transferred to Iran under the Foreign Military Sales program. The agreement provided for periodic visits by U.S. security experts to discuss procedures, equipment, and facilities for the protection of classified information, and to ensure that such information was receiving adequate protection.

Third, did the U.S. Government take into account the AWACS "multiplier effect" when approval was given to the enhancement of the F-15?

Fourth, will the training of Saudi crews for the AWACS take place entirely in the United States? Will any U.S. citizens participate in routine operational missions of Saudi AWACS in Saudi Arabia? Will any U.S. personnel perform maintenance or training functions on board AWACS operational flights?

Fifth, what is Saudi Arabia's manpower capacity to absorb high technology systems without additional requirements for U.S. technicians? How many U.S. military and civilian personnel are now stationed in Saudi Arabia in connection with previous sales of U.S. military hardware to that country? How many additional U.S. military and civilian personnel will be required to be stationed in Saudi Arabia if this entire package (the AWACS, F-15 enhancement, and KC-135 tankers) is approved?

And finally, what impact would the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia have on the military stability in the region? In particular, as a potential adversary of Israel in another Middle East war, what capability would AWACS give Saudi, Syrian and possibly Jordanian air forces? Would this require significant purchases of counter-measures on the part of Israel to neutralize the potential offensive capability associated with AWACS?

These are the major concerns I have relative to the proposed sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia. In light of the significant controversy surrounding the Carter Administration's original proposal for the sale of AWACS to Iran in 1977, the proposed sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia is certain to spark even greater controversy in the Senate than in 1977.

In 1977, the Shah was agreeable to accepting important modifications in the AWACS and the other assurances the President gave the Congress. Would the Saudis be amenable to similar modifications and assurances? I am concerned that the intense public debate which will follow the formal submission of this package not be detrimental to our relations with Saudi Arabia. Therefore, I believe it is important that the concerns I have raised in this letter be addressed adequately prior to the formal submission of the arms package to the Congress.

Thank you very much for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Byrd

Robert C. Byrd

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Dear Senator Byrd:

Thank you for your letter of April 9 to the Secretary regarding the proposed sale of enhancement items for Saudi Arabia's F-15 aircraft. Your letter raises several complex questions which we will need to consider very carefully. We hope to have a complete reply to your questions within a short time following our consultations in this Department and with the Department of Defense.

Sincerely,

Alvin Paul Drischler
Acting Assistant Secretary for
Congressional Relations

The Honorable
Robert C. Byrd,
United States Senate.

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